REMARKS/ARGUMENTS

The Office Action contained objections to the claims, and rejections of the claims under 35 USC §§102 and 103. Each is responded to below.

a. Response to Claim Objections

Claims 12, 13 and 25 were objected to because of certin informalities, that have been corrected as follows:

Claim 12 has been amended at line 3 to replace "of said flange" with --said flange--.

Claim 13 has been amended at line 3 to replace "of said flange portions" with --said flange portion--.

Claim 25 has been amended at line 3 to replace "a hoop portion" with --a hook portion--.

Accordingly, it is believed that the objections to the claims have been overcome by the present amendment.

b. Response to Rejections of Claims under 35 USC §102

Claims 1 and 23-25 were rejected under 35 USC §102(b) as being anticipated by *Nealy* (U.S. 5,137,483). For the reasons explained below, Applicant respectfully traverses the rejections.

Firstly, Applicant respectfully traverses the assertion put forward in the Office Action that "*Nealy* discloses a connector assembly capable of use with a tarp." *Nealy's* device is specifically designed to be used with a thick board (a "body board"), and includes an elongate cylindrical member 34 that and cooperates with a preformed bore through the board. As a result, cylindrical member 34 spaces the opposing faces of the male and female members apart and they can never come into contact with one another, or against a thin sheet of material such as tarp. *Nealy* therefore does not show male and female connector members having broad, flat bearing faces for engaging material of a tarp, as required by independent Claims 1 and 23.

Furthermore, *Nealy* does not show a screw portion having a sharply pointed tip for piercing the material of a tarp, as is also required by the claims. *Nealy* does not describe end of the threading member as being sharply pointed, and in the figures (FIGS. 1 and 2) the end has an obtuse taper and is therefore blunt and not sharply pointed as is expressly required. Moreover, the purpose of *Nealy's* taper is merely to center the shank in the threaded bore of the cylindrical projection 32, and not to penetrate through material. Consequently, Applicant submits that even if the end of *Nealy's* shaft could be forced through a tarp, it could only be done with excessive force, and by ripping/tearing and causing extensive damage to the material, and that it is therefore not capable of piercing the material as required by the claims.

Still further, *Nealy* does not show a female connector member having a threaded socket portion, as is also required by the claims; instead, as noted above, *Nealy* shows a projecting cylindrical portion. In order to clarify this distinction, Applicant has amended Claims 1 and 23, and also independent claim 14, to recite that the socket portion is "recessed into said bearing face of said female connector member so that said bearing faces of said male and female connector members are able to meet in substantially face-to-face contact when said connector members are tightened together"; as noted above, the projecting cylindrical member causes the faces of *Nealy's* connector members to remain spaced apart when they are fully tightened.

In summary, *Nealy* fails to show connecting members having bearing faces for engaging the material of the tarp, a screw portion having a sharply point tip for piercing the material of the tarp, and a threaded socket portion that is recessed into the bearing face of the female connector member, which limitations are all required by both independent claims. Applicant therefore respectfully submits that *Nealy* fails to anticipate the claims under 35 USC §102.

c. Response to Rejections of Claims under 35 USC §103

Claims 1-23 were rejected under 35 USC §103(a) over *Velasquez et al.* (U.S. 5,490,309) in view of *Nealy*. For the reasons explained below, Applicant respected traverses the rejections.

The Examiner argues that *Velasquez* shows the elements of Applicant's claims except for the screw and socket, for which *Nealy* is cited. Applicant respectfully disagrees, and submits

that even when combined the references fail to show all of the limitations that are required by the claims.

With respect to independent Claims 1, 14, and 23 Applicant traverses the assertion that *Velasquez et al.* show "a handle portion 32 extending from the base portion...for being gripped and rotated by the fingers of the hand". Applicant respectfully disagrees: Element 32 of *Velasquez* is not a handle at all, but is instead a ball socket (column 3, lines 35-36). The entrance to the socket is raised slightly above the surrounding surface in a shallow dome (see FIGS. 1 and 2), but this does not form a handle portion and it would be physically impossible to grip and rotate it between the fingers of a hand. *Nealy* does not show a handle portion either. Therefore, even if combined, the references would fail to meet the requirements of independent Claims 1, 14, and 23.

The dependent claims contain additional limitations that further distinguish over the references:

With respect to Claim 3, Applicant traverses the assertion that *Velasquez et al.* show "raised protuberances 54 [having] substantially rounded contours capable of avoiding damaging material of a tarp". To the contrary, *Velasquez's* protuberances are pointed and form teeth that penetrate into the material (column 4, lines 26-29), and would therefore damage the material if rotated.

With respect to Claim 4, Applicant traverses the assertion that modifying *Velasquez* to have elongate, substantially oval protuberances is a mere obvious change in shape. As is noted in Applicant's specification, the radially extending oval protuberances provide the significant advantage of increasing the frictional resistance without causing damage to the material of the tarp, thus allowing the members to be screwed together and tightened without harming the material, but then preventing them from accidentally unscrewing, which is not obvious from *Velasquez*.

With respect to Claim 5, Applicant traverses the assertion that the "connector members" of *Velasquez* "each comprise a raised, substantially flat-surfaced clamping ring formed annularly around the screw and socket portions, respectfully, capable of clamping a tarp about an opening formed by the screw portions so as to prevent tears from propagating therefrom (Figure 1)." The peripheral rims (92, 94) of *Velasquez* are only formed on <u>one</u> member in each pair and not the

other, and furthermore they are not flat-surfaced as required by Claim 5. Moreover, the rims are spaced outwardly from the edges of the opposite members (i.e., so that the rims circumscribe the latter e.g., see FIGS. 2 and 5), so that they cannot meet. The connector members are therefore not capable of clamping the material as required by Applicant's claims.

With respect to Claim 10, Applicant traverses the assertion that *Velasquez* shows a connector in which "each handle portion 32 comprises a flange portion extending generally normal to the base portion". As noted above, element 32 in *Velasquez* is a low dome; no flange is present and it would not be possible to grip the sides of the dome between a thumb and forefinger.

With respect to Claim 11, Applicant traverses the assertion that it would have been obvious to modify *Velasquez* to have a handle portion as required, because "*Nealy* teaches a connector assembly wherein a flange portion comprises a generally semi-circular flange having first and second sides that flare concavely towards a base portion of the connector member" (making reference to FIG. 6). The projection on the top of the male member in FIG. 6 of *Nealy* is only a small tab for attachment of a cord, and there is no teaching or suggestion that it is a flange or that it could be gripped between a thumb and forefinger or used as a handle. Moreover, even assuming *arguendo* that the tab might be capable of functioning as a handle, the reference contains no teaching or suggestion that it is semi-circular or has first and second sides that flare concavely towards the base portion of the connector member, both of which are expressly required by Claim 11.

With respect to Claim 13, Applicant traverses the assertion that a "curved cross-section portion defined by the bore in flange 32" of *Velasquez* constitutes a hook portion. As noted above, the "bore" in *Velasquez* is in fact a ball socket, and cannot be considered a hook.

With respect to independent Claim 14, in addition to the other distinguishing elements. Applicant again traverses the assertion that element 32 of *Velasquez* constitutes a handle portion. Furthermore, for the reasons explained above, *Velasquez* does not teach or suggest radially arranged oval protuberances, nor is such a configuration an obvious change in shape. Applicant also traverses the assertion that *Velasquez* shows protuberances having substantially rounded contours; instead, *Velasquez* shows pointed teeth that penetrate into the material.

With respect to Claim 17, Applicant traverses the assertion that *Nealy* shows a male connector member having "a two-stage screw comprising a tapered thread portion proximate the pointed tip; and a straight sided thread portion proximate the base portion of the male connector member" (referring to FIG. 6). In FIG. 6, *Nealy* does not show any tip at all and the threads on the male member are all straight-sided. In FIGS. 1-2, *Nealy* shows a male member having a bluntly pointed tip, as noted above; however, the threads are again all straight-sided and there is no tapered thread portion as required by the claim.

With respect to Claim 18, Applicant again traverses the assertion that *Velasquez* shows male and female connector members having raised, substantially flat surfaced clamping rings, for the reasons explained above.

With respect to Claim 21, Applicant traverses the assertion that a "curved cross-section portion defined by the bore" in *Velasquez* constitutes a hook portion, for the reasons discussed above.

In order to establish a *prima facie* case of obviousness under 35 USC §103, the references when combined must teach or suggest all the claim limitations. For the reasons explained above, the combination of *Velasquez* with *Nealy* does not teach or suggest the elements of the independent claims 1, 14 and 23, while the dependent claims recite additional limitations that are not shown by the references. Applicant therefore respectfully submits that the cited reference fail to establish a *prima facie* case of obviousness against the claims, and requests that the rejections under 35 USC §103 be reconsidered and withdrawn.

d. Conclusion

Applicant respectfully requests reconsideration of the present application in view of the amendments and remarks set forth herein. It is believed that the claims are now in condition for allowance. If there is any matter that can be expedited by consultation with Applicant's attorney, such would be welcome. Applicant's attorney can normally be reached at the telephone number given below.

Signed at Bellingham, County of Whatcom, State of Washington this 19th day of April 2006.

Respectfully submitted,

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